

Chapter 1 Addendum

Introduction

The Austin Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan was adopted by the Austin City Council in 1979. This approval followed nearly a decade of intense deliberations by the citizens of Austin regarding critical choices facing the future of the Austin region. This was in direct response to rapid changes that Austin had experienced in the previous three decades. From 1950 – 1980 the population of Austin more than doubled. (The City of Austin’s population increased from 132, 459 to 345,890, and the region’s population increased from 256,645 to 585,051). The prevailing development pattern changed from traditional mixed use neighborhoods tightly focused around downtown to sprawling low density/single use development typical of the post-war period.

Austin residents involved in the development of the Austin Tomorrow viewed these changes from two distinctly different perspectives. Some were excited about the prospect of the Austin Region growing into a premier metropolitan area that offered unparalleled cultural and economic opportunities. Others were concerned that sprawling development patterns lacked identity and were threatening Austin’s sense of community, stunning natural environment, and fiscal viability. The Austin Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan sought to introduce policies and strategies that accommodated the anticipated growth while mitigating their negative environmental, social, and fiscal impacts.

Many of these policies and strategies have subsequently been implemented. A series of ordinances and initiatives implemented in the decades of the 1980s and 1990s resulted in greater protection of water quality, endangered species, and other environmental resources. Other initiatives were designed to strengthen neighborhoods, direct growth into desired development zones, promote a greater mixture of land uses, revitalize downtown, provide affordable housing, and foster development patterns friendly to transit, walking, and bicycling. These initiatives are summarized in the Chapter 4 addendum and are the primary source for the proposed changes included in this interim update.

Interim Update Process

At the direction of the City Manager, the Neighborhood Planning and Zoning Department staff reviewed the Austin Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan during the summer and fall of 2007 to test the feasibility of completing an interim update. The concept was to accomplish an update by integrating and consolidating existing adopted policies into the existing Austin Tomorrow document. A proposal to complete this interim update was forwarded to the Comprehensive Planning Committee of the Planning Commission and subsequently the full Planning Commission passed a resolution recommending that the City Council authorize the proposed update. The City Council passed a resolution on December 13, 2007 authorizing and directing an interim update of the Austin Tomorrow

Comprehensive Plan. This resolution also requested that the Planning Commission and City Manager study the long term planning needs for Austin within the context of the Austin Region beyond the interim update.

In January of 2008, an interdepartmental team began a review of Chapter 2: “Goals, Objectives and Policies”. This team met a total of 5 times and crafted changes and additions to obsolete portions of Chapter 2 and reviewed drafts of proposed updates to the Chapters 1, 3, and 4. After the staff review was complete, a preliminary draft of the proposed update was forwarded to the Comprehensive Planning Committee of the Planning Commission for review. The Planning Commission held a public hearing on the draft Plan on May 27th, 2008 and forwarded the recommended changes to City Council on June 18th, 2008.

Summary of Changes

Chapter 2 Changes

Chapter two contains general policy statements that guide the remainder of the plan. This Chapter is the result of extensive and direct involvement by the citizens of Austin. The Planning Commission and the City Council approved this chapter before the development of the growth management strategies contained in Chapters three and four.

Austin Tomorrow emphasized the need for the City of Austin to use a full range of techniques to accomplish the recommended growth management strategies. These included recommendations to aggressively manage the extension of utilities to promote desirable development patterns. Changes in State law and City policies have limited this tool to guide development and this update reflects some of those changes.

Many of the environmental policies of Austin Tomorrow have been implemented by the passage of ordinances, initiatives, and the public acquisition of environmentally sensitive property. To a large extent, the changes to the environmental policies recognize these ongoing implementation efforts.

Austin Tomorrow contains a series of economic development policies directed towards discouraging economic expansion that promotes in-migration and open access to negotiations and agreements regarding public/private partnerships. Some of these policies have been modified and others removed. Some of the changes reflect the practical necessity to balance the need for confidentiality while providing open and transparent public access to the decision making process.

Austin has developed and implemented plans, programs, and policies to encourage the production of affordable housing. The Housing and Community Development section has been extensively modified to reflect these changes.

Chapter 3 Addendum

The Addendum to Chapter Three summarizes the major issues and policy choices that Austin was facing while developing the Austin Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan. It compares the plan's critical assumptions regarding the negative impacts of sprawl against the population and development patterns that emerged since its adoption.

Chapter 4 Addendum

The Chapter 4 addendum summarizes the process that was used to identify the preferred growth areas recommended by the plan and their implementation strategies. It also summarizes and categorizes major planning initiatives that have been undertaken since the plan was adopted. These initiatives are brought together in a summary fashion and are presented in graphic form as a new "growth concept map".

Conclusion

While this interim update process has provided an important forum to integrate and coordinate Austin's existing growth and development related policies, it is, by definition, limited in scope. It does not, by design, provide an interactive forum to engage the entire Austin Community in a coordinated process to comprehensively think about the future of the City within the context of the Austin Region. It does not fulfill the need for a plan to proactively address the critical public policy issues and tradeoffs associated with the anticipated population and employment growth of the Austin region for the next 20-30 years. Due to the specific requirements contained in the 1985 charter amendment, in relationship to the content of the existing Austin Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan, this cannot be accomplished through an update of the Plan, but would require the development of an entirely new plan.

